WRITERS'

CREATIVE WORKSHOP

1957

Polly Benson

ONCE YOUNG AND OPEN-MINDED

As I grow older, I still read
Avidly:
Austen,
The sports section between March and October,
Sometimes even classical economic theory.

But a new idea rippling the world
Of knowledge and assumption
No longer excites my
Jelling curiosity: it is new;
It is unproven. How can I possibly
Accept a presumptuous
Hypothesis?

I prefer the old, the acceptable,
Done in a familiar manner.

Polly Benson

? (I don't understand this either)

Something watches me;
It stares calmly with one
Large unblinking eye,
Waiting.

Sometimes it isn't there --
I automatically look for it and
Then, quickly, again,
Trying to see it before
It knows I've lost it.

If it sees me first, it will
Capture me,
Paralyze my mind with
Its sterile eye,
And throw me down,
No longer needing to be watched.

Polly Benson

The alarm clock, placed just
Far enough away from my bed
That I can't turn it off without waking,
Ticks patiently,
Waiting.

Dependable as morning,
It rings. I press myself
Flat against the mattress,
Trying to sink in,
To ignore all but the
Enveloping pillow.

Knowing I'm awake,
It runs down, but still
Stares reproachfully at me.
Resigned, I sit up,
Look threatingly back at the weather,
And start to think about today.

Polly Benson

DISILLUSION

Forever
I have looked up to you:
You knew what I didn't,
You had done what I always
Wanted to do.
I asked questions,
You answered
From your boundless experience
And assurance.

Now you turn to me,
Unexpectedly
Asking for my advice:
I cannot answer;
I can only stand
Watching an idol
Dissolve,
Becoming a person.

Polly Benson

VARIATION ON AN AFTER-DINNER SPEAKER

Without trade,
We would not have had Florence
And its civilization.

The Medici
Developed that Art
(And incidentally
Patronized the arts.)

The Medici, the traders,
Also inspired
Machiavelli,
The political philosopher.

It follows then
That we must have
Trade
In order to have
Civilization,
The arts,
And philosophy.

Trade creates
And traders are
The artists,
Not only in Babbitt's day,
But in the past,
And, inevitably,
In the future.

Polly Benson

Halfway up the mountain
I stand alone
And cry:

For loneliness,
For hatred,
For misunderstanding;

But the rough wind
Dries my tears
Before they fall,

Polly Benson

DIAMONDS

They shine --
So do stars,
So do eyes that are filling with tears.

They are hard --
So is stone,
So is a scornful look at someone who fails.

They are plentiful
So is grass,
So are people who want to be more than they are.

Why do we love them so?

Polly Benson

We plan carefully,
List and remove obstacles,
Formulate a course of action
In careful chronological order.

A factor hitherto
Ignored, or even counted on,
Becomes, without warning,
An obstructing independent variable:

Invalidating our careful plan,
Creating obstacles,
Destroying our carefully chronological
Course of action.

Polly Benson

ON APPROACHING MATURITY

Sitting comfortably before the fire --
The fading embers are much warmer
Than a fresh bright flame --
I shift my position slightly,
Look around at my cozy familiar surroundings,
Move again,
And yawn.

Polly Benson

BUSINESS CYCLES

Cycles ought to move
In sedate even rhythms:
Up and down,
Changing slightly,
Serenely average.

We analyze the pattern,
Emphasize its fallacies,
Bring on worse depressions,
Sinking down,
Chaotically normal.

Polly Benson

Does it matter
If there are answers to the
Questions we,
Intensely intent,
Discuss?

Life will go on;
The earth will continue to revolve:
Though we do not
Understand
How or why.

Polly Benson

KNOWLEDGE VERSUS ERUDITION

About ten miles from now --
If books were measured in
Miles instead of pages --
I will have learned a little;
That is, if I can make myself
Plod slowly. I try but
Cannot keep the tortoise pace;
I must sprint, and soon
Collapse, spent but happy,
Perhaps never reaching a
Plodder's goal.

Polly Benson

I come in reluctantly --
The day is too alive to waste
Under a sterile impersonal light bulb;
But the smell, the sound, the taste
Of the air cannot be enjoyed alone.

I come in; I see you;
I say immediately:
"It's spring -- why are you
Sitting here?"

You shake your head and
Smile: "You know it's
Only February."

Polly Benson

?

The phoenix, otherwise
Similar to
An ordinary hen,
Lays just one egg,
Dies hatching it,
And lives again
Just as it did before.

Polly Benson

TWENTIETH CENTURY

Afraid to be alone,
To be outstanding,
To be independent,
To be unafraid:

We are winning the fight for mediocrity.

Polly Benson

TWENTIETH CENTURY

I ran, desperately
Racing against myself, the shadows,
Those who had gone ahead,
Those who would come behind.

I ran, hopefully
Anticipating my arrival,
And, arriving, found only
Death.

Polly Benson

How can you, of all people,
Be sympathetic now --
You, who always say
You hate hypocrisy.
What if he was my father?
You know I hated him,
And am glad he is dead.
Yet now you send
Your deepest sympathy
And "understand"
How great my loss must be.
This I might expect from others,
Not you.
You know me, knew him, too well;
But you send your deepest sympathy.

I despise you,
Hypocrite.

Polly Benson

AMERICA, LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

Mr. Jones, a prominent industrialist,
Gives, quite free of charge,
His opinion on the government.
He is heard, approved, and elected to public office
By other prominent industrialists
Although he has never read the Constitution
And boasts that the only government he has really studied
Is methods of "getting around" the Sherman Act.

Mr. Wolchek, who runs a clip joint on North Clark Street,
Has become useful to the mob
Who organize crime in the district.
Since he is easily controlled,
They nominate and elect him
Alderman.
Following the policy of mutual protection,
He eventually becomes Mayor.

Mr. Olsen, who owns seventy acres and farms seventy more,
Has always been a good neighbor.
He loans his tools, and, many times,
His labor, and expects no payment.
A Farmers' Committee feels that he will best represent their interest
In the State Legislature.
He is elected, and tries to serve honestly; but no one remembers
That he couldn't get through the fifth grade.

Mr. Farrell, A.B. in political science and Phi Beta Kappa as well,
Decides to go into business instead of the
Government because, after all,
Business pays better and besides,
Most politicians are crooks;
Even those that aren't are not the
Kind of people with whom
One would care to associate.

Polly Benson

Puddles of rain water on the fire escape,
Nervously ruffled by the live March wind,
Reflect not a dead wintry dullness
But the brightness of today,
Joyously proclaiming that spring is here.

Polly Benson

CONFORMITY

Let's all wear gray,
Uniform, colorless, characterless gray --
With no make-up and our hair pulled
Back with rubber bands.

Uninterested, uninteresting, we
Shall aimlessly plod nowhere,
Noticing life only through
Our own distorted gray reflections.

Polly Benson

CONVENTION DINNER

At the long table on the platform
Sit the Very Important People
Of this particular meal.

The most Very-Important of all
Include:
The speaker,
Several local and visiting dignitaries,
And the man who introduces them all.

They smile,
Compliment each other,
Diffidently brush off compliments,
Make slight (but very well received)
Jokes about
Business,
Their wives,
Or sex,
And eventually
Begin to speak.

Polly Benson

THE GRASS MAY SEEM GREENER

As I struggle through the barbed wire
Bordering the field in which
I was once content,
I suddenly laugh at myself
For bothering:
The field I will find is
No better than the other,
And when I reach it,
My struggle will have been
Ridiculous.

Ruth Frame

THE CORMORANT

The Cormorant

with staring eye

with naked beak
and black wing feather

walks in the bamboo
edge of the river

where tall reeds move
before his coming

in the last ebb
of the water's running

where the pale shadow
of the lotus breaks

in the green water

in the ripple
of the river

in the eye of

the Cormorant.

Ruth Frame

BESPECTACLED

Between Time Then
And Time Now,
Between our right eye
And our left,
We wear the spectacles
Of Time Imagined.

We shut one eye
To peep through
The colored plexi-glass,
And the World obliges us
By blushing.

Shut the other eye
And astigmatism
Distorts the shadows
Out of all
Proportion.

With both eyes open
We are still myopic,
Seeing no further than
The pointed bones
Of our own noses.

Only when we close both eyes
Can we relieve the pinch of
The frames by rubbing
Our blisters with
Humble, trembling fingers.

Ruth Frame

THE MEMORY

When wooden horses whirl
in the circle of a painted rim,

and there is magic
in a toy balloon,

then I am again
soft in the memory
of a gentle day

and a song within.

When I am alone
and lonely

in the barking neon
of myopic streets,

then I am again
brave in the strength
of a hand

strong in mine.

Ruth Frame

IN ANSWER TO THE CLOCKS

The clocks in all my rooms were ticking
Like grasshoppers on a summer night,
Clicking like Poe's beetle
But with no promise
Of reward finite or infinite.

I couldn't help thinking
It was all damn silly.

Shut up, I said.

I'll be rude if I want to.

Gloom, gloom, gloom,

You're nothing but
Old moles
Grubbing about in the cellar.

Well, I won't stay here.
I'm going up.

Ruth Frame

WINTER TREES

Listen to the trees
Rattle in their chains.
Their splinter-bone fingers
Clutch for the wind,
Trying to throttle
Winter.

Ruth Frame

MY SISTER

I.

Like wind
in grass
my sister
walks,

like sun
in rain,

like summer
weather,

insect call
and bird feather,

my sister
walks
in golden
weather.

II.

My sister
walks
in a green
day,

in leaf,

in shadow,

in cool shade
and quiet meadow,

by singing water,

and by still water,

on wet stone
and dust rock,

gently
my sister
walks.

III.

Gently,

swiftly,

here,

there,

like fire,
like flame,

like humming
stone,

in all the
secret places
of my Alone,

my sister
walks
with me.

Ruth Frame

#1

The Face is calm.
The mask is carefully held in place.
The lips are greased, the jaws well oiled,
And the cheeks are cleverly suffused.
The eyes obediently transmit illusion
And the automatic brain
Registers the image as disillusion.
This is tabulated by the tongue
Into a series of meaningless
Statistics, phrases, and cliches
According to the Formula
Of the Day.

The tongue clacks,
The ears receive the vibration,
And the process begins again.

The Watchers are pleased.
They rub their pale hands
In a moment of brief,
Efficient satisfaction.
Noting the regularity of the pumps,
The steadiness of the pistons,
And the uniformity of the product,
They adjust the dials slightly
To conform with a new regulation.
Taking their places quietly
They wait for the Inspectors
To conduct the Investigation.

Deceived by the temporary passivity of the machine
They do not perceive that all is in decay,
Or that the mask is, after all, only a mask.

Ruth Frame

WHEN I WAS SEVEN

When I was seven I had three stomachs, like a cow. They came in assorted sizes, like the twenty-cent, ten-cent, and five-cent bags at Kroeger's. The big stomach was for brown sugar and safety-stick lollypops (rootbeer flavored). The everyday, middle-sized, breakfast-lunch-and-dinner one was for meat and potatoes, and ordinary things; but the small one was mostly a trash basket for lima beans and other rubbish.

On Mondays and Tuesdays we had hash and leftovers, so I never filled more than the little stomach. Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday we had beef, or pork, or lamb, or fish; and if we had gravy I sometimes had to put dessert in the third stomach because there wasn't room in the middle one. But on the week-ends when we had fried chicken and mashed potatoes, and my Aunt and Uncle came to dinner with my baby cousin Benjy, I would eat and eat, until I was waddling-full. Then my Uncle would look at me sternly from under his black eyebrows, and say, "That child has more stomachs than a cow!" Everyone always laughed, but I was a serious child, and not content to have only the stomachs of a cow. I wanted horns too.

When dinner was over on Sunday and we children were free to run outside and play, I used to go off by myself into the cool shadows of the locust tree by the creek. Lying face down with my toes in the water, I chewed on the sweet grass and counted the swallows as they bumped down my three stomachs. I ate grass for a week, but nothing happened except that I was ill in the night and twice Mother had to come and change my bedding.

On the seventh day I switched to clover, being particular not to eat the stems. The clover agreed with me, and one day, trembling with hope, I took Mother's silver hand mirror from her dresser. My sister held it for me while I

undid my French braids and carefully parted the hair on both sides of my head. But where there should have been two tiny bumps my head was smooth and bumpless. I tried eating dandelions, and once, even, a red tulip.

I guess it must have been the heat, or the spray they put on the lawn, or maybe I just didn't try hard enough. Anyway, the weeks were very long, and I grew tired of clover and of grass. There were other things more important, like swimming lessons, and grasshopper races. I grew three inches, and my jeans had to be let out, and I learned to dive, and to wear a ribbon in my hair. But I didn't grow horns. And somehow in the confusion of those warm days I lost count of my stomachs until I wasn't sure if I had three, or two, or only one.

I don't remember much about when I was little. But when I taste the sweet grass with its acid tang of dandelion plucked aimlessly from the lawn where I sit typing, I touch the top of my head, and remember when I was seven and had three stomachs, like a cow.

Barbara McClancy

NIGHT WALK

"What a damn fool I am," thought Peg. She looked around her, hoping to see someone, anyone, but the streets were deserted. The only sounds were the dreary sounds of the rain. The sight of the stranger beside her made her shiver, and she drew her coat more tightly around her. Together they walked on and on. They met no one, it was too late at night. Peg felt the rain oozing in her shoes and trickling down her neck. She longed for the noisy sounds of life, but the city was asleep; the only sound was their echoing footsteps as they walked in the cold wet darkness.

She wished there were some miraculous way she could erase the whole day, and live it again. Bitterly, Peg remembered how gay she had felt several hours ago as she stepped off the train. There were only a few hours to wait, and she would catch the train home for a nice peaceful vacation. After checking her luggage, she went into the lunch room for a piece of pie. She had been sitting there for several minutes when she felt someone watching her. She caught his eye just as he looked down. The man was seated a few places away from her; a young man, perhaps 24 or 25. Their eyes met several times in spite of Peg's efforts to keep her attention on her pie. Each time she looked up, he was looking at her with a strangely watchful expression on his face. Peg was surprised to find that she was shaking a little when she got up to pay for her pie.

The normally busy station was almost deserted. Not too many people had to catch trains late Saturday night or early Sunday morning. Peg picked out several magazines at the newspaper stand, and settled down in the waiting room for a long stay. The story she started to read was one of those frothy romances women's magazines are fond of printing, calling for very little concentration. Hearing a sound beside her, she turned to see the young man sitting down in the chair next

to her. She went back to her story, but was poised and waiting for him to speak. Although she expected it, his voice made her jump. She answered his trivial question curtly to cover her own confusion.

Peg tried to pick up the thread of her story again, but he led her into conversation with a practiced manner. He talked smoothly and easily, and to her surprise, she found herself replying in the same easy manner. Usually she found it hard to talk to strangers. He asked about her home, her family, and her job until he knew a good deal about her life. When Peg tried to find out about his home and family, he did not exactly cut her off, but neither did he answer her questions. He told her only that he was a medical student with two more years of school ahead of him. When they compared timetables, they discovered that their trains left approximately the same times. He suggested that they go uptown to a movie or some place to dance, but Peg refused, saying that she preferred to wait in the station because of the heavy rain outside.

She suspected that he knew this was only an excuse, but he did not press the point. The question had surprised her. He did not look like the kind of person who would ask a girl he had just met to go dancing. He was tall and clean-shaven, almost handsome in a dark exotic sort of way. She never could remember his name; he had muttered it under his breath when they had introduced themselves. She accepted his second offer of a drink in the bar to make up for her refusal to go up-town with him. She regretted it almost as soon as she had done so. He did not give her much time to think, but walked her firmly to the bar. For some absurd reason, she felt as if everyone in the room was looking at them, but the only person looking at her was the stranger sitting across the table from her, trying to hold her hand. There was something about his appearance that disturbed her. He was well-dressed for a college student, wearing the latest Ivy League clothes, but for some reason they did not suit him. After their drinks came, he brought the conversation around to her refusal to accompany him up-town. There

was nothing to be afraid of, he said, he just liked her company, and did not want to spend the next few hours sitting in the station waiting for his train. She tried to make the properly reassuring reply, but failed completely, and could only reiterate her former excuse. She had the uncomfortable feeling that he could read her thoughts, and knew the real reason for her answer was her distrust of him. She could not tell whether it angered or amused him. To relieve the oppressive atmosphere, Peg asked if he would mind ordering her a package of cigarettes. She began to smoke one after another rather rapidly whereas, normally, she rarely smoked at all. As they left the bar, she excused herself and said that she was going to the women's room to freshen up. As he dropped her hand, he took her coat and said that he would hold it for her, but she replied that she needed something in one of the pockets, and took it from him. She wondered if he knew how she wished that she could stay in the lounge until her train came, and just wanted to keep the coat to make sure that she came out again. Remembering his clammy hands, she washed her own with more energy than usual. As she put on her make-up, she wondered if he might think that she was doing it for his especial benefit. If she had had any sense, she never would have encouraged him in the first place. There was no turning back now; she had to go on and make the best of the situation. He was waiting for her at the entrance, and rose to his feet as soon as he saw her. Peg did not want to sit any longer, but neither did she want to go for a walk with him. She decided to go to the information desk and ask about her train. There were still several more hours to wait, so there was nothing to do but go back to the waiting room and sit down. Unsuccessfully she tried to lead the conversation to various impersonal subjects. Persistently, he turned it back to her refusal to go out with him. She began to feel increasingly ill-at-ease and said finally in exasperation that she would go for a short walk with him around the block if he felt in such dire need of exercise. She felt that she had to prove something to both of them. She regretted her decision as soon as they got

outside of the station. The city was unfamiliar to her; the only part she knew was the few blocks around the station. As they walked, the comfortable lights of the station got farther and farther away. Peg wanted desperately to turn back, for he was leading her farther and farther away from the station, but she was afraid. They kept on walking and walking. Gradually his grip tightened on her arm until he seemed to be dragging her down the streets. When they stopped under a street light for him to light a cigarette, Peg realized what had disturbed her about him. Although he was dressed as a college student normally would be, he was far too old to be a student. His face looked different under the harsh street light; she could see the network of lines around his eyes, and the leathery toughness of his neck. She felt as if she had started down a long perilous path and was powerless to turn back. Small things were imprinted on her mind as if they would never be forgotten. Perhaps in the years to come, she would awake in the middle of the night, terrified because she had remembered them: her feeling of helplessness, the rain from the umbrella that kept dripping on her shoulder, reminding her of the way they used to drive people mad; the empty sound of their footsteps as they echoed in the silence. His arm slipped from hers, and went around her waist. As they came around a corner, the wind caught her scarf and blew it away. Peg tried to stop it, but it got away from her. He shoved the umbrella into her hand and began to run down the street after it. Suddenly, without knowing what she was doing, Peg dropped the umbrella and began to run. He cried out, making her run faster. For some reason she began to think of a dream she used to have as a child. She would be running away from something, sometimes she never knew what it was, but it frightened her. It would get closer and closer, but when she tried to run faster, her legs would not move. It would feel like some one had wrapped a blanket around them. Finally, the darkness would envelope her, and she would begin to fall and keep falling until she woke up. But this was no dream; the footsteps behind her were real. Peg could hear him as he

began to run after her. Her fear gave her the power to run as she had never run before. She kept twisting and turning down the narrow streets. When she had to stop for breath at last, she realized that the footsteps had stopped. Peg leaned against a building and bent her head back, letting the rain run down over her hot face. She opened her eyes and looked at the sky. Something in the skyline looked familiar; she realized that it was the famous clock in the courthouse building, just a block from the station. Quickly she walked to the corner, and then to the station. She splashed through puddles and walked through mud, eager to reach the safety of the station, never thinking, until she reached the entrance that he too would have to come back to the station to catch his train. She noticed a large hotel a few steps away, and almost ran over to it. The doorman looked at her oddly, and seemed ready to make a motion to prevent her from entering. Peg brushed past him, entering the comfortable lobby of the hotel. She did not recognize herself in the mirror. Her hair hung in damp strands, and there were leaves stuck to her coat. No wonder the doorman had not wanted to let her in. Peg started to laugh, but a sob caught in her throat. She sank down into one of the comfortable chairs. In a half hour, his train would leave and she could go back to the station. They would probably never meet again.

What was he really? The whole experience could have been built up in her imagination, but was it? She would never know, and in a way, she was glad.

Beth Mears

?

Strange, it seems, that I
Was born, will live, and die --
Possible, true,
For her, or you.

But why
I?

Beth Mears

RELEASE

I am alive,
It is more than I can bear
To thrive
In a snare.

Comes death,
I drop the sieve:
Death... now
I live.

Beth Mears

I am an entity
An identity
I exist within time
(Which according to some, exists within the
I occupy a place mind)
In space.
I am specific
I have no beatific
Visions
Such elisions
Are a reversal
Of the concept of the universal
Whole --
I am small.

Beth Mears

If I were a first rate poet
I'd be the Best.
If I excelled in modern philosophy
I'd start a School --
An Academy, or a Stoa --
Or some such memorable enterprise.
If I were a fine dancer
I'd be the Prima some day
In the spotlight, on the stage of the Sadlers Wells
ballet.

However
Some people
Have secondary talents;
Some people will exist, all their lives,
In that delightful intermediary stage
Between being an illustrious celebrity
And a Nothing.
Some people are happy, playing in the sun,
Jack-of-all-Arts, and master of none.

Beth Mears

A CONCEIT

I may as well be a window pane
For I have been melted, and then hardened,
But am still breakable, and transparent.

You can see right through me,
But you cannot see me -- at least
Not very well, and then only the flaws.

That which you see in the distance,
Looking through me,
Is very inviting, and beautiful.

Well go ahead -- break me
So that you can get out --
And run, run to see what is on the other side of
that hill.

Beth Mears

CLOUDY NIGHT

Dusky velvet sky, embroidered with black tree-patterns;
Leaves drooping softly brush the short, mouse-colored nap;
Heavy, warm, ample sky,
Is my counterpane and my comforter as I lie, childlike,
On earth, my couch,
Reassured by dim starry nightlights, hung above my bed
So that I shall be afraid
Of nothing.

Beth Mears

FAKE

This plaid is sad,
It's not really plaid --
It only pretends.
In criss and cross
Somewhere there's a loss,
Without any friends.
Just a span in a small clan
Is much better than
To be frantic,
Overwrought, and distraught,
Contemptuously thought
Unauthentic.

Beth Mears

RETREAT

Polly and I saw last night, in the sky,
A rainbow around the half moon.
"How nice," we observed (we were both quite reserved)
"That means it will rain again soon."
Loverly clouds covered Sky with thin shrouds,
We sensed the foreboding simoon;
But we rained no tears, we just shrouded our fears
In clouds nicotine -- the greenroom.

Beth Mears

After great pain
Comes sleep
Long sought
To seep
Into the detached frame.
The only thought
Is Rest,
No blame,
After the test
Tame.

Beth Mears

NOT BELIEVE?

"I do not believe," said the fool;
They turned and stared;
He ignored their surprise --
As if he cared!

They probed at first like a surgeon,
With cold steel;
They would find the growth and remove it,
The place would heal.

He awoke with pain from the drug,
He screamed aloud,
Broke free from the straps on the table;
They said, "He is Proud."

They began to rebuke him, sternly --
He was his own;
They said, "He is mad, it is useless,"
They left him alone.

Solitude broke him,
He claimed reprieve;
He called them back -- bitterly --
"All right -- I Believe."

[illegible]

[illegible]

"I do not believe [illegible] really
They turned and [illegible]
He i[illegible] [illegible] [illegible] —
As if he cared

They [illegible] at [illegible] [illegible],
[illegible] only stood;
They would find [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] it,
The place would [illegible]

He [illegible] with [illegible] [illegible],
He screamed alone;
Broke free from [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
They said, "He is [illegible]."

They began to [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] —
He was his own;
They cried, "He is [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]"
They left him alone.

[illegible] [illegible] [illegible],
He clutched [illegible]
He [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] —
"All right — [illegible]

Alice Morris

WORDS

Here we are, being young,
Using words,
Saying, life, arm, sweat, love, pain,
Being.
Here we are
All alone,
Saying nothing.
Here we are, alone, alone, alone,
With words,
All, all alone.

Alice Morris

HONESTY IS A DOG

Honesty is a dog
With bad breath,
And freedom is elephant;
Charity is a garden hose,
And modesty is the spot in my eye
That keeps going down.
We are only self-stuffed balloons
And sometimes vacuum cleaners.

Alice Morris

THE SULLEN AGE

Lynn Mackie lay on her back and perspired. The room was hot and stale, but she would not turn on the fan.

"I'll rot first. I'll just lie here and rot on my bed before I turn on her damn fan. 'Turn on your fan, Lynn. You'll make yourself sick in that hot room.'

"I can't get any sicker than I already am. You make me sick to death, Mother dear. 'Eat your breakfast, darling. You've been looking so pale and thin.' It's just you, Mother; it's you who make me pale and thin. I'd rather vomit than eat when you use that sacrine voice on me. Then you use your weary voice on Daddy and say, 'If that child doesn't get over her sullen age soon, I'll go crazy. She resents everything I tell her.'

"Perhaps she's right. I'm in a sullen age now, but she can't understand. I'm wrong. Everything I do or say or think is absolutely and completely wrong. I'll just rot, just lie here and rot.

"I guess there's no excuse for me. I can't very well say, 'Well, Mother, the reason I didn't make up my bed is that I saw a dead squirrel in the street yesterday and he was squashed all over the pavement.' She would give me one of her weary looks and say, 'Oh, child, why are you this way?'

"Oh, she's right. That's why I'm so sullen, I guess. I'm just a fourteen year old fool. I wish I could just rot away. I feel rotten on the inside, and there's no cure for rot. Why do I like that word so much? Rot, rot, rot, hate, hate, hate. I hate this whole putrid world with all the simple, putrid people. Putrid, putrid. That's a nice word, too.

"Could I say to her, 'You see, I'd eat my breakfast but it wouldn't do any good. I'm rotten on the inside, and I can't digest my food. It sticks in my

throat with a sticky, sweet taste.' Then she'd say, 'You just try to make your mother feel ill, don't you. All your life you've been a difficult child. Why? Why are you this way, Lynn?'

"Difficult? was I difficult? Was it difficult for her when I used to play by myself? Did it make her feel bad when I wouldn't play with my dolls? Or was it because I didn't like Sunday school and church? I used to be very religious when I was six or seven. I even remember wanting to be Jesus Christ. I thought I was the Daughter of God, and I wondered why He didn't speak to me. I used to go out in the woods and climb a tree and pretend I were God. I would stretch out my arms and chest and pretend I were ruling the world. Then I began to doubt it all, and I decided to test God. I put those rocks in a basket and asked God to turn them into eggs; but He didn't do it. Anyway I never much believed in Him after that, and Sunday school was silly.

"I guess that's what's known as a difficult child. And now, well now I'm just a fool.

"I'd really like to be better. I'd like to be cheery and bright and helpful and cute. I'd like to talk to them and offer to do the dishes or wash the car; but what would we talk about. 'Do you know that I think I'm a fool?' or 'Doesn't it make you sick to see dirt under someone's fingernails?' They'd look weary and say, 'OH, Lynn, why must you be such a difficult child?'"

Alice Morris

TOMBIGBEE

The little boy lay down on his stomach in the front of the boat, a little flat bottomed skiff. His cousin pushed the boat from the bank and jumped into the back. It eased out into the slow current and drifted down the stream. The boy pulled off his shirt and leaned over the edge of the boat. The rough gray wood scraped his arms, and he stuck them deep into the water. The water ran up over his shoulders, and the boat slowed down. It moved to one side and then to the other, so the boy took his arms out of the water and rested his chin on them. He looked down into the stream. He could see the sand at the bottom. The water was dark and the stones looked like black shadows on the bottom. There were a few fish, bass; and they sometimes moved among the rocks.

The sun was bright. The little boy's skin felt hot, and behind his ears and on his neck the sun seemed especially warm. The boy crept down into a corner of the boat. There was a little water in the bottom, and the boy put his hand in it and rubbed his palm against the boards. It felt cool, and he smoothed some behind his ears. He relaxed and closed his eyes. The splash of the water lulled him to sleep, and the boy dreamed. He dreamed of the land and people, and his dream was a chant to the rhythm of the stream:

The river was called the Tombigbee,
It was dark and deep and slow.
It flowed through the land of the Southeast,
And it watered the dark red earth.
Children played in its shallows,
They built dams and dug in the sand.
When they grew older they swam in the deep parts
And they fished by the shade on its sides.

The Negroes lived by the Tombigbee.
They were happy and carefree and mild.
They farmed the red earth and they loved it;
They laughed and they sang as they worked.

Often at night they had meetings
Where they sang and they shouted and prayed.
Oh, the Negroes were very religious,
But also were sometimes afraid.
They feared the magic of evil,
They feared the darkness at night:
So they charmed away evil spirits
And seldom went out in the dark.

The boy dreamed of the flat land, dusty, hot and dry. At night the winds were cool, and sometimes he could hear wolves in the pine trees. He dreamed of nights when he walked outside, and of the chill he felt when he heard the wolves. The stars were so bright on those cool nights that he did not need a light to see the land. He ran down the dirt road and crossed the highway. He went to the mounds where there had once been excavations. The land here was sandy and fine. He crept to a hollow in the mounds and lay in the dirt. The stars were thick in the sky and the little boy yearned for them. He longed to stretch out and take them in his hands.

Then it was day. The sun was shining on his face. He wanted water. He was in the woods, running. His body was scorching, but he could not find the creek. He was lost now; he ran faster. Suddenly he fell headlong into the creek. The water was strangling him; it was all around him and cool.

The little boy woke up. His cousin looked over the side of the boat at him and grinned; then he pulled off his jeans and slid out of the boat into the water.

Alice Morris

FOR THOSE WHO SWALLOW LIFE

I

I tasted life and liked its taste
So I took a helping;
And when I had used that, I went for more.
Then it became a need
And so I am an addict.

I need sadness:
The sadness of children who are lonely,
The meek look of an old man with a gentle
walk and a worn suit,
The despair of a fat girl who sits out
all the dances and still tries
to smile,
The agony of a boy who sees his father
kick a dog,
The hopelessness of the old woman who talks
to children because others will
not listen,
And the humility of the dirty little boy
who falls down and smiles because
he is too shy to cry,
I need this sadness.

I need happiness, too:
The happiness of glad songs and dancing
motions when we are about to burst
wide open with energy and joy,
The happiness that makes us scrape our
shoes in the crunchy gravel and
smile at the world and say,
"Dear old world, I do love you."
The happiness that makes us want to breathe
hard and run and run and run,
when we have talked long and said
what we wanted to say, or written
deep from our reserve, or met
someone we love,
And I need the fluid peace when our heart
smiles, when we wish to write
in small, neat letters, or watch
our feet as we walk carefully
home.

I need ugliness:
The ugliness of an old woman whose face
is crushed and distorted,
Of a skinny dog with an open sore,
Of a man with soft, plump hands,
And the ugliness of a large girl with a
poor complexion who talks loudly
about herself.

And then I need beauty:
The beauty of night,
Of a gentle girl in love,
Of little children in pajamas with footies,
Of a familiar place when we know we must
leave it,
And the beauty of a girl who swallows each
day's life as if it were desert.

II

Sometimes I would like to vomit.
I would like to throw up all the times
I have lived poorly,
When I have written hurried letters in
large writing and said much
ugly nothing,
When I have talked past truth because I
could not stop,
When I have not said to my sister, "What
a nice bear you have; is he alive?"
When I have said howareyoudoing and meant
to smile,
When I have asked a question and already
known the answer,
When I have eaten even after I was full,
And when I have kissed a boy I did not like.
I am stuffed with unlived days and wish to
throw them up.

Enid Slack

ONE PAPER BAG INSIDE ANOTHER PAPER BAG

While recently lamenting to a professor that my college career has thus far been wasted, and at present shows no signs of being otherwise during the few months of home stretch which are left to go, he immediately advised me to read Robert Benchley's essay "What College Did To Me" for quick and easy consolation. The essay was such a hilarious "Outline of Education," as Benchley calls it, that I read the entire volume in which it was contained and wasted more time that should have been devoted to my organized curriculum.

To my delight I found that Benchley did not learn any more in college than I have! The most valuable thing he recalls from his freshman year is that "By placing one paper bag inside another paper bag, you can carry home a milkshake in it." Probably the most important thing I learned is that the barberry bush, which is situated on our campus behind the library, is alternate host to puccinia graminis, commonly known as wheat rust.

Reading Benchley's essay is an amusing experience. But it can be more than that; it can make us really reflect on our education and make us seriously consider what we <u>are</u> doing in college.

Our activities are varied. For one thing, students sit for hours at a time in the smoker, and gripe; if grades were given in "Complaints of the College Curriculum" everybody would merit an automatic "A". We go to classes, take notes, devoting "half the page to drawings of five-pointed stars (exquisitely shaded)", and slyly glance at our watches as we hastily lower our heads to keep the professor from seeing us yawn for the ninth time in his face. Occasionally, we study -- before a quiz or exams. Book shop sales on the College Outline Series shoot upward like jets soaring into the sky after almost grazing our roof tops. (Someone should make a sociological project, keeping a graph on the rise and fall of sales of such cram books at strategic times of the year.)

Having prepared ourselves half the day by drinking coffee and frantically swallowing No-Doz pills, we stay up all night memorizing the contents of spiral notebooks which have green-lined paper because green is restful for the eyes of weary students. About half way through such a wretched nocturnal session we scream in disgust, "All I want now is to get a "C". I wanted to make an "A" but it's just too darn much trouble."

In this one exhaustive utterance we express the universal sin of college students. We measure our knowledge in terms of the venerable "A", we measure our whole education in terms of grades. And this seems to me to be one of our basic failings. For an education should be measured only in terms of life, of what it does for us as human beings. It should teach us, if nothing else, how to think and, to some degree, how to live.

Thinking is an agonizing process which we avoid as much as possible. Students will wear out the soles of their shoes trudging through the library stacks in search of a critical analysis of a novel, for instance, before or even instead of attempting to formulate their own critical ideas. Listen any time to conversations in the halls of Fletcher and you will hear someone say, "I just whipped into the lib and found this great book that tells all you need to know about Hemingway. I put it in my paper and that was that. Didn't take me long at all."

We boast of such a feat as checking out a library book. Abnegation of thought is hailed as a virtue. Naturally we don't like thinking -- it is laborious, painful effort. Forcing our minds to activity is like trying to start a frozen car on a cold morning, or taking dance exercises when our muscles are stiff. Thinking should rightfully cost us a lot of mental pain in the same way that learning to dance costs a lot of physical pain. But even

a small amount of concentrated study could awaken our minds and make us feel alive mentally. If we stretched our minds until they ached like tired muscles, even occasionally, we could experience the fun of thinking for ourselves, not just the pain.

When we have worked long and hard over a term paper and have expressed our own thoughts rather than paraphrasing someone else's, we have added something to ourselves. What we have studied becomes our own and nobody can take it away.

A liberal education should teach us something about living. We will forget the chemistry formulas, the dates of poets, and the names of battles; but we should take with us for all our lives the joy of learning, some kind of value judgments, and an interest in various subjects. It is easy for any student to go through four years of college without thinking or making any kind of value judgment; we can get by with outline books and the encyclopedia and every year colleges graduate people who are more like vegetables than students. They have no interest when they leave college, mainly I think because they do not bother to find one. They have become too accustomed to passive education.

And they become disinterested citizens who do nothing in their communities. It seems to me that the people who are fortunate enough to graduate from college should do all they can to help raise the cultural standards wherever they live. I don't mean that they have to write a treatise on education or form an organization for erudite individuals; they can simply share their knowledge with other people, they can help create an interest for others in good books or music or art, and raise the conversational level.

But if we allow ourselves to turn into non-thinking vegetables, who always want someone else to think for us, we not only fail to share our knowledge with others, we deny ourselves the right to the joy of learning. We cannot lock up our education in the attic trunk along with our diploma and our cap and gown, where they will collect dust for years. Education must be a life-long process. If we want to become human beings we must realize the inextricable relationship between education and life; they are an inseparable unity. If we separate them we miss the whole purpose of college.

Janet Wynn

REFLECTION FROM A LEAFLESS TREE

> And man has met and defeated every obstacles, every enemy except one. He cannot win over himself.
> -- John Steinbeck

Fall leaves resisted the commanding gestures of the wind. They clung to the branches, but rotting stems pushed them from their secure homes. The wind tossed them high, sent a colored spray against Cynthia's window, and took them possessively to the ground. Cynthia mourned for their inevitable defeat, feeling close to their struggle to keep their former splendor. She watched the yardman cursing each leaf as he pushed them into piles. He leaned on his rake and scowled at the tree, daring it to drop more leaves. Cynthia hated him; she hated his arrogance but most of all she hated his contempt of helpless leaves. Jim laughed at her; he could not understand why she took each comment of the yardman as an insult, but he did not sit and watch him. He only came home at night when the offending and tedious hours of the day were over.

Cynthia left the window and went to the crib across the room. She watched the sleeping child, so small and so alive. "Susan, hello, Susan" she murmured. "Susan Elizabeth Harding." She wondered when Jim's mother would come to see her granddaughter. She knew the visit would be uncomfortable; a namesake could be no compensation to Jim's mother who resented her, despised her for robbing her son of a large and respectable wedding. She had refused to read the article in the newspaper, the article starting gossip and rumors. "Mr. and Mrs. Edward Long announce the marriage of their daughter Susan to Mr. James P. Harding, in Cross Plains, December 5." The inadequate and impersonal item might have been the notice of epidemic, caught at by the people of the town and reviewed with disgust.

Cynthia remembered the party last Christmas - the sparkling tree, the vibrant champagne, the carefree spirit. She and Jim were in love - in love with each other, with the holidays, with the party. There was too much champagne; they drank

to everyone, to past loves, and to their future together. They laughed too much, danced too long, and when they returned to Cynthia's house, they loved too long. She remembered the night she told Jim about her pregnancy. He put his arms around her and said, "I love you all the more, my darling." They made plans for getting married and explained to their parents that they had eloped early in December. Cynthia could still see Mrs. Harding's hands tightly clasped, relaxing in defeat, jumping back into action with white, curved fingers. She sat back in the chair and looked at Cynthia. She said nothing for a moment, but looked at Jim, staring into his eyes. She seemed to pity him, to ask him why he had done this. She turned to Cynthia and said slowly and unsteadily that she wished them every happiness. There was none of Mrs. Long's emotion, none of her dejection ending in enthusiasm.

Cynthia heard a knock on the door of the apartment. "That horrid little man," she thought as she let him in.

"I finished the leaves, missus. Can I have my money?"

She got two dollar bills from her wallet and handed them to him. "Here you are, Carl. Good bye."

"Yes, missus, thank you. It looks like it'll be an early winter. Them old leaves keep pilin' up. I sure will be glad when they all get down and out of the way."

"Yes, Carl . Good bye." She shut the door. She did not want him near Susan with his vile breath and dirty clothes. She went back to the crib to see if Carl's growling voice had awakened Susan. She smoothed the cover and went into the kitchen to fix dinner. She hoped Jim did not come home early; she did not want to leave Susan alone with him. She took some pieces of cold chicken from the icebox and opened a can of peas. She knew Jim did not like cold chicken, but he would complain no matter what she fixed for him. He was critical of everything she did. She was tired of hearing him tell her to call her friends, to talk to the

neighbors, to wash her hair, to press her clothes. She did not want to hear his suggestions anymore; the addition of "sweetheart" to his repeated reminders insulted her. She knew he was sincere only with his criticism. If he would leave her alone, she would do as he wished. She had tried to be a good wife, but Jim did not appreciate her efforts.

"Cynthia, I'm home." She walked softly to the door of the kitchen and watched him. He was standing by the crib looking at Susan. He shook the blanket a little, and Susan opened her eyes. She moved slowly under the yellow blanket, smiling at her father. He leaned over the crib and talked to her, holding one of her square fingers. Cynthia saw him bend down and look at the screws on the side of the crib. "He'll unfasten them so she'll fall out, and it will look like an accident," she thought. "He thinks I don't know what he wants to do." Jim looked up.

"Hi, I didn't know you were standing there."

"I know you didn't."

"Is dinner ready? I'm starved."

"Not yet."

Cynthia pushed the crib by the kitchen door so she could see Susan. Jim could not do anything to her while she watched him. She remembered the first time she had suspected him of wanting to hurt Susan. She had put the crib by the foot of their bed. She woke up when Susan started crying. Jim was holding her and looking at her. Cynthia watched him as he carried Susan to the window by the streetlight. She held her breath. He stood there a minute until Susan stopped crying; then he took her back to her crib. He got in bed and went to sleep. Cynthia did not sleep the rest of the night, watching Jim, wondering what he wanted to do to Susan. She asked him the next morning what he was doing. He told her he had dreamed Susan was sick, and he had woken up suddenly. He got up to see if she was all right. Cynthia said nothing, but she did not believe him.

She flipped off the eye of the stove and emptied the peas from the pan into the serving dish. She carried dishes and silverware to the table, piling them in the center.

Jim picked up Susan and brought her to the table. "She's had enough sleep. Let me play with her for a while." He held her awkwardly on his lap and smoothed her finely curling hair. She settled in his arms and closed her eyes.

"No - after dinner, maybe."

Cynthia took Susan from him and put her in the crib. Susan cried for a moment; Cynthia took a warm bottle from the stove, thrust it into the open mouth. She went back to the table and sat down. Jim smiled at her.

"I saw Carolyn today. She wants to see you. She has been wondering why you didn't call her back about coming to lunch."

Cynthia pushed her hair from in front of her eyes and took a small serving of peas. She looked past Jim to the heated eye of the stove. It seemed to be watching her, its stare growing more and more intense. It hypnotized her, compelling her to come to it, to lay her hand on its hot coils.

"Cynthia, you aren't listening to me. What is wrong with you?"

She looked at him, trying to focus her eyes on him. She laughed suddenly. "Carolyn doesn't want to see me. Why should she? She's not quite sure I'm good enough for her any more. There seems to be a question of my morals."

"Now, look, let's not have any of that. Your friends all want to see you, but you won't ever leave this house. No one is concerned with your morals but you, Cynthia. They are your friends, and they do not ask you out to stare at you. You have to stop feeling guilty about Susan. You know it doesn't make any difference to me, and I am the only one who knows we got married sooner than we had planned. Susan is our baby, ours together; that's what is important. Cynthia, I love you and I always will."

"Sure, Jim, I know."

He patted her hand and started eating. She watched him. "He looks tired," she thought, "but he always looks tired. Why does everyone have to be tired? I'm tired too, but I don't complain." She wanted to lean over to kiss him. She used to meet him at the door, having waited for him to come home all day. He was always tired, though, too tired to match her enthusiasm. He always wanted to rest at night. "Why does he have to make excuses? Why doesn't he tell me he doesn't want to talk to me? You're a coward", she thought as she watched him drinking his coffee. "Why don't you tell me you hate me, that it's not your work but me. I could almost love you again, but you could never love me. You never did; you were too young to know what you were doing."

"Cynthia, I've asked you twice if you're feeling well. What is wrong with you? You've changed so much in the past few months. I think you need to get out of this house. You don't ever do anything but stay in the house all day. You have worn yourself out, taking care of Susan. Cynthia, are you listening?"

"Yes, Jim. I'm listening." She picked up a fork and pushed the peas on the plate into a square.

"I talked to your mother today. She's worried about you too. She wants you to go to the mountains with her for the week-end."

Cynthia pushed the peas into a triangle. She leaned back in the chair and looked at Jim. He had stopped eating and was frowning as he watched her. She pressed her hand hard against her forehead and smoothed her hair back.

"You want me to leave for the week-end? I suppose I can. We'll have to find some way to take Susan in the car."

"I thought you could leave her here. Mother has been wanting to see her so she could come over to take care of her."

Cynthia stood up and took some dishes from the table. She carried them to the sink and turned on the water. The clear column of water bubbled over dirty platos, struggling to remove the scum. She moved her hand around the rim of

a blue saucer, feeling its unity and smoothness. Her hair fell onto her forehead, and she threw her head back to remove the annoying dirty strand. "Leave Susan here," she thought. "So that's why he's so interested in my health all of a sudden."

She picked up another cup, feeling a chip in its surface. Raw edges of glass pricked her fingers. She turned around, holding the half-filled cup.

"No, Jim, I can't leave Susan here. I don't want your mother to take care of her. She hasn't bothered to come to see me so she can't see my baby."

"Now, sweetheart, Mother has been meaning to come by. You know she's been out of town for several months. She just hasn't had the time since she got back."

"I don't care. I can't leave Susan here. She'll have to go with me."

"Look, Cynthia, I'm getting tired of this. I do think you need a change. You've been so depressed lately."

"I'm all right, Jim. I can't be cheerful all the time. I have moods too, or haven't you noticed?"

"Of course, I have, sweetheart. That is why I am so worried. You used to snap out of them quickly though, and now you never do."

Cynthia cut off the water abruptly. "Oh, cut it out, Jim. You don't care what happens to me. You seem to spend most of your time away from home."

Jim pushed his fingernails into his palms, straightening in his chair. "I've got to work, sweetheart. We have to have some way to meet expenses. I want you and Susan to have a comfortable life."

"It's my fault again because you have to work so hard. Why do you keep reminding me?" She sat down in the chair by the table and repeatedly pushed unkept hair from her forehead again and again.

Jim stood up and walked over to her. He tried to put his arm around her shoulder. She pulled away. "Cynthia, please don't be this way. I'm so worried about you. You really do need a rest. I'll keep Susan here, and you go away

with your mother for a while. Maybe you'd better stay a week instead of a week-end. It would be good for both you and Susan."

She pushed her feet out in front of her, sliding down in her chair. She followed the edge of the table with her finger, watching it move quickly, slowly, roughly, smoothly; the pattern was broken by a crack near the corner.

"No, Jim, I can't leave Susan alone. She needs me."

"I'll take care of her, and Mother will be here. I don't want you to hate her so. She likes you very much, Cynthia."

"Sure," Cynthia laughed.

"You'll see she does, and Susan will be fine. After all, I am her father, and I worry about her as much as you do. You can leave tomorrow."

She moved her chair, turning her back to him. "Not unless Susan goes with me."

He pulled her chair around toward him and looked at her. His face was close to hers, and she felt shaking hands on her shoulders. "I don't understand you; I have tried and I don't pretend to. Susan is perfectly safe with me."

"I'm sorry you don't understand me, Jim." She laughed. "Yes, I really am sorry."

"Cynthia, look at me." She threw her head back to replace the piece of hair hanging before her eyes. She looked at Jim's perspiring forehead, wrinkling with a frown. He looked at her intently. "There must be some reason why you won't leave Susan here. Don't you trust me? I won't hurt her; I could never hurt her." He stood back and looked at her, trying to laugh. "Good heavens, Cynthia, what do you think I'm going to do - kill her?"

"Yes, Jim, I do."

He walked slowly over to her, trying to steady the hands he put on her shoulders.

She stood up, pushing him away. "You hate her just as you hate me. She's

ruined your life." She walked into the living room.

Jim put his head in his hands; he leaned his elbows on the table, knocking over a glass of water. He did not notice the cold stream running over his chicken and peas. "You're sick, Cynthia, you must be sick. Why would you think I would kill her?"

Cynthia went to Susan's crib, picked her up fiercely, and sat by the window. Leaves were glistening under the streetlight, helpless in the piles into which they had been raked. Susan squirmed and looked questioningly at her in her arms. "He won't hurt you. He won't get near you as long as I'm here."

Cynthia saw Jim standing in the doorway. His hands were pressed tightly against the woodwork. His face was solemn; he bit his lips. He was looking at Susan, standing quietly, thinking. He seemed to be afraid, not of himself but of something he could not define. He looked at Cynthia; she saw the muscles in his cheeks tighten. "Cynthia", he whispered in an unsteady voice. "Cynthia, please go away and leave Susan alone. Please - for me and for her." Cynthia turned her back and held Susan closer to her, ignoring the baby's muffled cries.

Helen picked up another cup. Involuntarily she traced the dainty handles running her finger from the beginning of the rim to the end. As she neared the farthest point of the handle for the fifth time she stopped and pushed the cup into the dish water.

"I must finish these in a hurry," she said to herself in an attempt to forget what had happened. "Arthur Godfry is coming on television at seven o'clock."

It did no good. Helen could not forget. All her thoughts these days were concerned with the same subject. Even an object as insignificant as a little coffee cup brought the terrifying quiver. She was on the last part of the curve. The important years were gone. The years when you decide the future. Now all she could do was survive until the curve ended.

Her hands, one of them still holding the dish rag hung still at her sides. It was the continuous sound of water dropping to the floor from the wet rag that awakened her from her thoughts. She pulled herself into an erect position -- maybe she drew her shoulders back too far. She took the dish from the right side of the sink and put it on the left. She could not let herself get into a routine.

The type of appearance that made people notice her when they first met her. It was a surprise to them when they suddenly realized she was pretty, maybe even beautiful. Her clothes were too plain, making her too much a part of her surroundings. Her mother would try to make her buy something a little bit different and of a bright color but when Helen put them on she was uncomfortable. She didn't want people to know she wanted to be noticed. When trying to decide what made her beautiful, people usually came to the conclusion that it was her long brown hair and brown eyes. They seemed to matter and in doing so made her skin appear quite fair. The girls at school always used to tell her what pretty hair and eyes she had.

"They are still pretty," Helen said as she pushed the hair back that had

fallen on her forehead. Then she thought of how long it had been since anybody had told her. One of the women at the office had casually remarked once, "You know, Helen, you've got pretty eyes," but it didn't really matter to Helen what she thought.

She put the last dish into the rack. "I think I'll let them dry and put them away later," she said out loud.

"Did you call me, dear?" a woman's voice sounded from the living room.

"No, Mother," Helen answered.

"You had better hurry. What in the world is taking you so long? I could have had them done ages ago. Arthur Godfrey will be on in a minute."

Helen thought of throwing the dishes back into the dirty water and letting her mother do them. "Wouldn't that stump her," she thought. "I could stand behind her with a stop watch in my hand and time her. Dear sweet little Helen wouldn't be so dear and sweet anymore. My mother's damn friends wouldn't be able to say, 'If only my _____ were more like your Helen. You never have to worry about her.' Maybe it would be more effective if I would throw them one by one against the wall."

Helen laughed nervously and called, "Yes, Mother."

She hung up the dish-towel, took off her apron, and went into the living room. Her mother looked up from her sewing, smiled and said, "All done? Oh, please turn that light off behind your father's chair. It's making a glare on the screen again."

Helen walked over to her father's chair. He was reading his newspaper, but she turned the light off anyway.

"I'm sorry, Ann," he said. "You should have said something before," and he got up and moved to the chair beside her Mother.

"There they sit," thought Helen. "A perfect example of all the jokes written about married people. Father with his newspaper and Mother with her sewing. It's all so damned typical. Don't they get sick of being typical? Watch television,

sew, read, gossip with a few old friends over the bridge or poker table, day after day, after day. They're married to being married. That's it, I never thought of it like that before. They're just married to being married. Oh, God, I'd go nuts. Maybe Caroline will call me tonight and get me out of here. I can't sit here another night and watch television with them, and listen to all the simple and ridiculous comments they have to make."

Helen got up and started to leave the room.

"Where are you going, dear?" asked her mother.

Helen thought, "Dear, dear ------ if I hear that word again I'll scream. She answered, "I thought I'd go upstairs and clear out some of those things in the back of my closet. Is that all right, Mother?"

She didn't wait for an answer. If her mother saw the tears in her eyes there would be questions and Helen knew she wouldn't be able to give the right answers tonight.

When she reached the top of the stairs she paused, letting the railing support her. She brushed the tears from her face and thought, "Maybe I'll call Caroline myself. We could go to a show or --." She stopped. She knew that she wouldn't call Caroline, and that Caroline wouldn't call her. They hadn't seen each other for a month now. Caroline was the only one of her good friends that wasn't married. They used to be able to talk and joke about it, but not anymore. The last couple of times they had been together they had gotten on the topic of college. Both of them had tried to outdo the other with tales of excitement and fun, usually concerning a past boy friend that "They sure were glad they didn't get too serious with." Helen's body trembled as she thought about it. "Two twenty-six year old women trying to prove to each other that life hadn't surprised them. Trying to prove they had chosen the life they were leading." It was horrible and both of them knew what the other was thinking.

Helen turned slowly and went into her bedroom. She lay down on her bed and didn't bother about wiping away the tears. "I honestly don't feel like that," she

cried wishing she had told Caroline. "I don't want to be married. Everyone stops growing when they get married. They think they've gotten what they've lived for. Well, they're all wrong. I've got much more than they do -- my wonderful job, and I meet all kinds of interesting people every day, while they -- they sit around a house and -- they live a slave's life. I hate marriage, and everything it stands for. I hate it -- I hate it."

She put the pillow over her head. Her sobs were uncontrollable now and she couldn't let her parents hear her.

"Helen, Helen, wake up, dear."

Helen turned over to meet the wondering eyes of her mother. "I guess I must have fallen asleep. What time is it, Mother?"

For a moment their eyes met. "Please, dear God, don't let her ask me anything," thought Helen, and she quickly looked away attempting, too late, to shield her red eyes.

Her mother put a hand gently on her shoulder and answered, "It's only nine o'clock, dear. Television Playhouse is beginning and there is supposed to be an excellent play tonight. The Johnsons came over right after you went upstairs and wanted to see you. They said their son, Bill, was asking about you the other day." Helen felt strange. Her mother continued. "He wants you to meet his fiancee. He said he thought you were such a nice girl, and that he had always liked you."

Helen smiled a little. "I'd like to meet her," she said.

Her mother answered her smile with one of her own, got up and left the room. Helen didn't notice her stop at the door and look back. If she had she wouldn't have been so sure when she said to herself, "I'm so glad Mother didn't notice anything. She might worry about me and what good would it do."

She walked to her dressing table and sat down. With her comb she put her beautiful brown hair back into order.

"I guess I'll go watch the play," she thought, and she went back downstairs.

Mary Kent Zimmerman

THE FUNERAL

"Will she always lie
Like that in the coffin,"
A voice asked quietly from behind.
"Hush little girl,
Of course not little girl,"
They said. "Be quiet and mind."

"It's a lovely casket.
Where did you get it, Kate
Have you got the land plot and deed.
Let's put in a picture
Of her little child
Maybe a copy of the Lord's creed."

Meet the train
I'll meet the plane
More people are arriving
Old friends
New relatives
Gather for the gathering.

More flowers
And still more flowers
More than they've had you know.
And look at the book
It's almost filled
Everyone loved her so.

They sometimes cried
And talked and laughed
"It's so good to see you again!"
One old man
Called "Uncle Jo"
Told "Uncle Tom" he had a bottle of gin.

She tried to listen
To what they said
Nobody had told her a thing
"Yes, yes, it's a shame
She's gone the poor dear,
What hymn do you think we should sing."

She crept near
And looked closely
At the beautiful white and gold box.
On tiptoe she stood
And reached one small hand
To touch the familiar white locks.

"Mommy, Mommy
Please talk, Mommy."
In her eyes was a look of fear.
She leaned forward
And kissed the face
"May I please go with you, Mommy dear."

Mary Kent Zimmerman

THE MASK

The sunlight crept under his eyelids and refused to let him sleep. "When is she going to get that damn window shade fixed? I've given her enough money to do it a million times", Frank thought. He turned over in an attempt to block out the sun, but the heat had penetrated his body and sweat from his face was beginning to drip on the wrinkled sheets. He threw back the covers and sat up in bed.

"Oh-h-h, my head", he moaned and lay back down. He quickly remembered the night before. He was still completely dressed, and an almost empty bottle of liquor was on the table beside his bed. He looked around the room. In one corner lay a pile of dirty clothes. They had left their clothes hamper at the last place they had been and hadn't gotten a new one yet. A woman's nightgown was on the floor where she had stepped out of it. The wall paper was torn, and in one spot there was the blurred remains of what looked like some drawings a child might have made. His eyes felt heavy and it was an effort for him to keep from staring once he had fixed them on something. Now he stared at this picture. It had been a long time since he had allowed himself to look at it and even more to think about it. He remembered the day he had come home and seen it. It had only been a week after they bought the wall paper. "The wall paper," he thought. "How could something like that wall paper mean so much to us." For six months he and his wife had saved their money to buy wallpaper for their bedroom. They had decided, since the trailer would be their home for a couple of years, they would try to beautify it. It took them one week to select the paper. Every night they looked over the samples that Janet would find at the stores. They finally decided on this one: it had a white background with large green leaves. "It's neither too womanly nor manly. It's both of us," Janet had said, and then quickly added, "Besides the white background will help to brighten the room." He remembered the night they had put it up. Their excitement had transferred to their two young children and they

insisted on staying up to watch. Then he had come home from work to find this scribbling on the wall. He had been furious and had stalked outside screaming for his two children. His little boy, Jimmy, had been the one to say, "I did it, Daddy." Frank had taken him into the trailer and was going to whip him. The little boy turned to him "I love the wallpaper, I love the wallpaper. I didn't mean to hurt it, Daddy", he had cried. "I was just telling it about the house it was going to live in some day. You know, the house you and Mommy were saying we were all going to live in."

Frank looked at the drawing again. There was the circle that Jimmy had pointed out as "a great big swimming pool for us and all the kids". There was also a pony with a square body and straight pencil marks for legs, standing in the yard. A large block was drawn in the middle of the yard: that was the house. He remembered that instead of whipping Jimmy, he had kissed him. The two of them had sat down on the edge of the bed, and he had assured the little boy that some day he would have his house, his swimming pool, and his pony. Only two days later Jimmy was dead. Frank closed his eyes and tried not to think any further, but something was different today. He would not block out the thoughts as he always would. He remembered everything feeling the same pain and horror he had that day two years ago.

He and Janet had gone to the movies and left the children with a baby sitter. When they got back home he had gone to get ready for bed while Janet went to check the children. He would never forget her scream. "Frank, Frank," she had called. "Jimmy, my baby, baby!" Judy, their daughter, frightened by her mother, started crying. When Frank reached the room Janet was holding Jimmy in her arms and was still screaming "My baby" over and over. Jimmy's arms and legs were hanging limply and his open eyes were staring directly at Frank. "Do something. Please do something," Janet was crying. He had taken the child and carried him into the living room. After laying the cold body down on the couch he had gone outside to the telephone booth and called the ambulance. "Hurry," he had said, "My little boy

is dying." He knew when he said this that Jimmy was dead.

Frank rolled his head from side to side as if trying to shake the thoughts from his mind. "Why," he thought, "Why should a six year old boy die in his sleep as though he were a sixty year old man?" He had never been able to answer this question. The doctors had been very kind. They had performed an autopsy and found that Jimmy had a small tumor on his brain that had begun to press on something. Frank couldn't recall the scientific term they had used. The doctors thought that would make everything all right. The minister too had an answer that would make Frank and Janet think it was all right that their little boy had died. Have faith and believe it was for the best.

"Frank, is that you?" his wife called from the kitchen. It's about time you got up. It's eleven-thirty. Do you think all I have to do is wait around so that I can fix your breakfast? What I should do is let you make it."

Frank tried to pretend that he hadn't heard. In fact, he would like to pretend that she wasn't there at all. Things had been getting worse and worse between them. It seemed to him as though they had not spoken a decent word to each other for two years. At night, seldom now, they would go through the act of being a married couple but even then few words of affection would be exchanged. If was often after a bad quarrel. She would end up crying hysterically and running into the bedroom. She would always slam the door hard. He would either find a bottle in the house or go out and buy a drink. Later that night they would attempt their make believe apologies. Their passion was so fierce at times like this that he wondered if they weren't trying to hurt each other instead of make love. He finally got up.

"Daddy, are you dressed already?" a little girl's voice questioned. Frank glanced up at his eight year old daughter, Judy, standing in the doorway.

"Of course, I'm dressed. You got eyes, haven't you?" He turned around, opened up his drawer and fumbled for his razor. She was still standing there watching him when he turned to go into the bathroom. Her eyes were slowly filling

with tears, and she pulled up the corner of her too large dress to wipe them away.

"Will you get the hell out of here and let me get ready?" he yelled. What right did she have standing there looking at him like that. He went quickly into the bathroom. He knew she was going to cry now, and he didn't want to hear her. It seemed to him that all she ever did was cry.

When he came into the kitchen his wife was beginning to cook his eggs. He could smell the fish dinner they had the night before, and for a moment he thought he was going to vomit. He sat down at the table and looked at her. At the beginning of the day her clothes were clean and overly starched. They seemed to stand out unnaturally from her thin body and too old-looking face. By the end of the day they were dirty and wrinkled clinging to her as if she had never taken them off. "How ridiculous she looks", he thought.

He looked down at his watch. It certainly was taking her long enough to cook the eggs. "Will you hurry up," he said. "You know I've got to be at work in twenty minutes."

"If you would get up in time you wouldn't have to worry. Instead you've got to stay up half the night drinking. Don't you think I get sick..."

"Shut up, will you."

He watched as she threw the fork she had been using to scramble the eggs back into the sink.

"You," she cried, "may cook your own breakfast ---- today and every day. As a matter of fact you can cook your lunch and dinner too. I'm not going to sit and listen to any more of your bitching." She ran out of the kitchen.

Frank listened for the sound of the door slamming. When it finally came he recognized it as the sound of the car door. "She must have run out the back door," he thought. He jumped to his feet and ran out after her, but he knew he was too late. "What in the hell does she think she's doing? She's not going to get away with anything like that with me. Just wait 'till she gets back."

He pulled his hands together and clenched them tightly as if he were saying a prayer. He marched back into the kitchen. He stood there staring at the eggs as they burned in the frying pan. The brown smoke fascinated him. Suddenly he noticed that his little girl had come into the room.

"Do you want me to fix your breakfast for you, Daddy? Mommy's showed me how lots of times."

The hopeful smile on her face irritated him. He swore a couple of times and then walked out of the trailer. He wasn't hungry anyway. Besides, he didn't have much time to get to work.

The place where he worked was fifteen minutes from the trailer camp. He was a shoe salesman now and today he was going to have to walk. He hated the job anyway. "Maybe I will quit today," he thought. "Maybe I just won't show up." He continued walking. Frank had always worked as a garage mechanic before. His dream had been to someday own a gasoline station of his own.

"Oh I had wonderful plans, didn't I." Frank laughed nervously. He remembered the man he had worked for four whole years. Six months ago he had fired Frank saying that if Frank would ever get hold of himself he could have his job back.

"Get hold of myself. Doesn't anybody realize that it takes a while to get over losing someone you love. Don't they know what death means." His boss had said he thought a year and a half was long enough already and that Frank was going to ruin his whole life if he didn't snap out of it.

For six months his family had moved from town to town in their small trailer while Frank got fired from every mechanic's job he tried to hold. It didn't even bother him anymore and finally he decided he couldn't even try. That was when he got the job as a shoe salesman. It was the admittance of final defeat, and although he realized it he didn't care.

He was in front of the shoe shop now and he walked in. He made explanations to the manager for why he was late and went to work. The morning was miserable.

He kept thinking about his wife and what he was going to do when he got home.

"I'll kill her. She can't do that to me," he thought.

After lunch a young couple walked in the shop to buy a pair of shoes for their young son. Frank tried to pretend he was busy, but the manager motioned to him to wait on them. Frank walked over.

"May I help you?" he asked as politely as he could.

The woman answered "Yes, we want a pair of shoes for Jimmy. It's his sixth birthday."

"Why do they always have to tell you everything" Frank said to himself as he knelt to measure the little boy's foot. "I don't give a damn what his name is or why he's getting shoes."

The little boy was watching him but Frank kept his head down and avoided his eyes. "It's getting to be a pretty big foot, isn't it, Mister," the little boy said, "Pretty soon it's going to be as big as my Daddy's."

Frank held the little foot in his hand and suddenly he wanted to hurt it.

"Ouch" cried Jimmy. "You're hurting me."

"I'm sorry" Frank said and he stood up. "You'll have to get someone else to help you. I don't feel well."

He was already out of the store when he turned and went back in. The manager had gone up to the people and was asking them what had happened. They watched Frank as he walked up, bent down, and kissed the little boy. There were tears in his eyes as he said to the parents, "Love him. Love him every minute you have. Watch what he does and what he says. You may have to remember it some day." He turned around and left the store.

"I know what happened. I know what happened," Frank didn't care who saw him crying. "We were afraid to love, afraid to plan because we were afraid that in the morning it will all be gone. How could we have been so stupid. We haven't even allowed Jimmy to live with us."

He hurried up the street towards home. He had so many things to say to his wife and especially to his little girl. When he reached the trailer he saw Judy sitting on the ground in front of it playing with her doll. A group of children were playing together nearby and he remembered that his wife had told him she was worried about Judy because she never played with the other children. He hadn't listened or cared at the time.

"Judy" he said softly. She looked frightened when she saw him. His arms were stretched out towards her and tears continued to roll from his eyes. He saw that she was not coming to him so he went over and picked her up. "Judy, honey" he cried. "I do love you and I'm sorry." He didn't know what else to say.

At first her body was stiff in his arms and then she began to cry too. She put her small arms around his neck and held tightly. He carried her into the house. There was a picture he wanted to show her. It was of a house, a yard, a swimming pool and a pony.